



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Days and Nights in the Forest (Aranyer Din Ratri) by Satyajit Ray; Nepal Dutta; Ashim Dutta
Stuart Byron

Film Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 3. (Spring, 1972), pp. 36-37.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197221%2925%3A3%3C36%3ADANITF%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2>

Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

weakness of our own stomachs. Personally, I suspect that a weak stomach may do more to protect us against the horrors of the total state than any amount of medieval niggling about free will and natural depravity. A strong stomach is the first requirement for a storm trooper.

Visual horrors abound in *A Clockwork Orange*, yet the worst moment may not be any of the murders, rapes, tortures, or beatings, but the moment when you notice that the film's monster, the manager of the aversion therapy to which Alex is subjected, has a Jewish name. Mere bad taste? Or the fearful symmetry of a nightmare? —JACKSON BURGESS

DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST

(Aranyer Din Ratri). Director: Satyajit Ray. Screenplay: Ray, after the story by Sunil Ganguly. Photography: Soumendu Roy. Art Director: Bansi Chandragupta. Editor: Dulal Dutta. Music: Ray. Producers: Nepal Dutta, Ashim Dutta. Production Company: Priya Films. Pathe Contemporary-McGraw-Hill. 120 minutes.

The first good news of 1972 is that this superb two-year-old film by Satyajit Ray—as well as his older *Charulata*—have finally been picked up for American distribution. Which doesn't mean that they will be available overnight as the releasing organization involved, the Pathé Contemporary division of McGraw-Hill Films, paid a relatively steep price for US rights and can be presumed to wait for a propitious moment to re-launch Ray in America. Though the amount may seem small to anyone not familiar with the declining market for foreign-language films in this country during the past few years, it will not be easy for Pathé Contemporary to recover the \$10,000 reportedly advanced for each of these Ray masterpieces. It's doubtful if any Ray film released here since the Apu trilogy—*The Music Room* and *Mahanagar*, for two—have earned in the five figures, for example.

Will even a smidgen of the audience for *Carnal Knowledge* take an interest in *Days and Nights in the Forest*? Logically it should, because *Days and Nights*, like *Charulata*, is a

deeper statement on male chauvinism and woman's estate, as well as being, apart from *Charulata*, the greatest film to date by a great director.

It concerns four upper-caste Calcutta bachelors—Ashim (Soumitra Chatterjee, once the adult Apu), Sanjoy (Subhendu Chatterjee), Hari (Samit Bhanja) and Sekhar (Robi Ghose)—who vacation for three days in the Bengali forest. But the only "forest" that they—or anyone else in the film—ever relate to is the forest of the self. That is the irony of the title: everyone in the film, city folk and "tribals" alike, has lost all contact with nature.

What remains remarkable about Ray is how skillfully he conveys ideas of alienation without any of the pushmi-pullyu straining of, say, Antonioni. His cinema is truly a *popular* one. We get to know his characters so completely that when they laugh, we laugh; when they're troubled, so are we. Our identification with each character is so sustained that Ray can change our mood simply by shifting his focus to bring somebody else into view. Is there any director since McCarey who has been able to involve us in quite this way?

The structure is "open" in a strange manner. *Days and Nights in the Forest* has been called Chekhovian, and this has some relevance except that the film ends with a series of revelations which in traditional dramatic structure would come at the end of the second (rather than third) act. Nothing has been resolved with any finality: Hari may have learned something new about the caste system, Ashim may or may not continue to see the woman Jaya (Kaberi Bose) when both return to Calcutta. All that can be said to have occurred is that some characters have seen some trees in their own forests. The vacation has been really a time in an unfamiliar environment (which might just as well have been another city), where one's own series of emotions can be seen against a neutral relief, and perhaps better understood. *Days and Nights* means to relate to the kind of complexity and lack of wholeness which confront us more often in life than in art, and for that reason the shots get shorter and

REVIEWS

shorter as the film progresses, less fluid and lyrical. A central image is a native dance performed at a county fair, shots of which are used as punctuation during climactic scenes. We see only the feet of the dancers, never their whole bodies.

But the dance is not a metaphor for the entire film; it is a suggestion. The film, India itself, is *maybe* a bodiless dance, *maybe* a part of a ferris wheel (we never see the whole wheel), *maybe* a word game interrupted visually with a search for pillows. We have always known that one can as well discuss Ray without India as one can discuss Ford without America. Here, the series of names bandied about in a word game—from Tagore through Shakespeare through Mao—is a sign of the dumping ground for the world's culture which India has become. But the game is not a simple narration track of a Godardian order. The *choice* of each particular name by each participant in the game is important, as is their success or failure at various stages in the contest.

Days and Nights confirms how far Ray has progressed since the relatively simplistic humanism of the Apu trilogy; he has developed a complex treatment of India based on coordinates with which Americans like myself may be unfamiliar. But I surmise that the ancestors of the main characters in the film were at the top of the heap at a time when the caste system was in full flower. Now, western influences have killed that system but offered no viable replacement.

At one point the men beg a ranger, probably of lower caste, into letting them stay at a forest road house where, undoubtedly, their ancestors would have been welcome guests when it was part of a maharaja's estate. Wanting old caste status, but in western terms, they are humiliated. They take out their confusions in aggressive ways—being mean to untouchables, for example.

All of the men want women to be westernized in appearance but Indian in their deference—but they cannot have it both ways. The Calcutta girlfriend of one has left him after he



Subhendu Chatterji, Simi, Robi Ghosh: Satyajit Ray's
DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST

has responded to a six-page letter with a one-page note. His way of working out his disappointment is to seduce a peasant girl—and then to suggest she wear a wig, like his Calcutta mistress.

Another meets a woman in the forest and is attracted to her intellectual background. But he admits to being glad that she deliberately let him win the word game. For all its behavioral charm and comedy, *Days and Nights in the Forest* is one of the most despairing films ever made. There is no hope for India, it seems to be saying. India can never be whole again—unlike Japan, as one character points out. One culture imposed on another resulted in a humpty-dumpty fragmentation—like the dance like the wheel, like the word game.

—STUART BYRON

THE GO-BETWEEN

Director: Joseph Losey. Producers: John Heyman, Norman Priggen. Script: Harold Pinter, based on the novel by L. P. Hartley. Photography: Gerry Fisher. Music: Richard Rodney Bennett. MGM.

Joseph Losey has always been, by vocation or destiny, a fringe man. Caught in the sidelines of the McCarthyist vortex, this self-defined "romantic Marxist" paid grievously, not really for the fairly mild social comment of films like *The Lawless* and *M*, but through guilt by association. Never subpoenaed, he ended up a martyr by proxy, a sympathetic bystander stung by a senseless backlash.

Blacklisted in Hollywood and exiled in England, Losey's punishment slowly proved